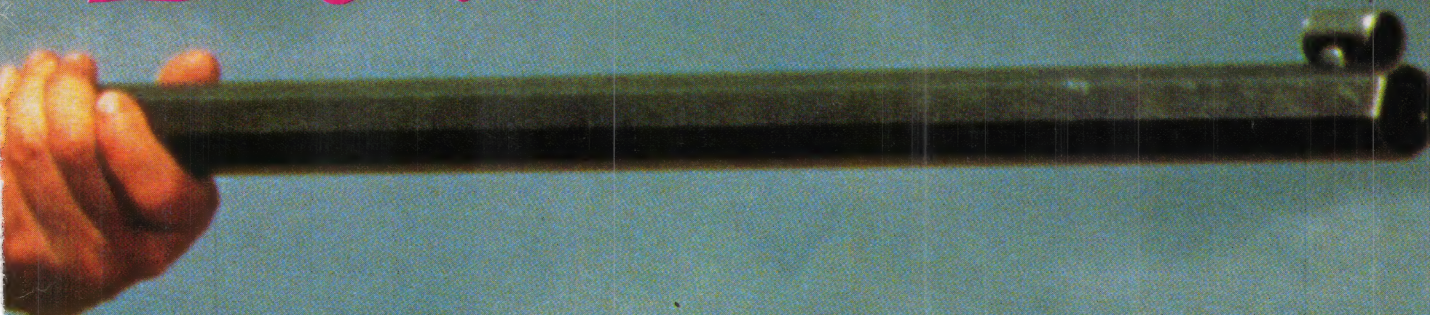




Laura Down Under



She made her debut in the sizzling *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, starred with Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*, and can now be seen with Tom Selleck in *Quigley Down Under*. Allan Bryce meets Hollywood hot-shot, Laura San Giacomo



The first thing that strikes you about Laura San Giacomo is how small she is. In fact it's difficult to imagine this tiny, slim, woman as the predatory 'bad girl' Cynthia of *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, all calf-length leather boots and skimpy black dress. In real life she wears round, thick - framed spectacles for reading that give her a beguiling, almost pixie-ish look. It's only when she begins to speak in that deep, husky voice that the sexy status quo is restored.

Laura is in London to promote a new movie called *Under Suspicion*, but the first subject under discussion when we met recently was *Quigley Down Under*, out this month on the Warner Home Video label.

In this highly entertaining movie the

very small Laura stars alongside the very tall Tom Selleck, who plays an 1860s American cowboy, living in the Aussie outback and feuding with evil rancher Alan Rickman. It's a rough, tough, but tongue-in-cheek western in the old style, and San Giacomo has the role of 'Crazy Cora', a barmy prostitute who latches onto Selleck's maverick gunman and shares a series of muscular outdoor adventures with him that would surely test any actress.

Most of the film was shot in a spectacular location about an hour and a half from Alice Springs, where the Territory's notorious red dust infiltrated everything (including the air-conditioning systems). "It was quite an experience," admits the actress,

"walking around in that heat wearing bloomers, a corset, and a skirt and shawl on top! When I was first offered the film I thought, 'Wow, a chance to work in Australia - great!', but that was before I realised that I would be wearing frilly costumes, clambering up slippery rocks, protecting a baby at my hip with gunfire, horses, dingos and so on..."

All this seems a very long way from Baton Rouge, New Orleans, which was the location of Laura's first big success, *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (Virgin Video). It was this 'little' film - shot for less than a million dollars - that kicked her acting career into gear. Dealing with the confused relationship between a yuppie couple, her sister and an old college friend, the movie was a colossal success that thrust everyone involved into the limelight.

Despite the title there was little physical nudity in the movie. Instead, director Steven Soderbergh's script required the characters to strip bare their emotional selves. Laura succinctly describes the plot as "the simple nightmares that can take place between four people. We spent five weeks talking about nothing but sexuality. It got so intense that I would dread it when Steve would ask for the set to be cleared (which he did for all the emotionally intimate scenes). I was always calling my friends in New York for support and perspective - my phone bills were very high!"

Repeated viewings of the film have brought some kind of objective distance, and made it seem even more pertinent to Laura's own situation. "I find I get lost in the story. And it scares me. I see things that have happened to me in my life or that I've done. It affects many people that way. People I don't know are always coming up to me after screenings and talking about how they see little parts of themselves in each of the characters."

The oldest of three children, Laura was determined from an early age to pursue an acting career. She studied her trade at the respected Carnegis Melon University in Pennsylvania, then began appearing in regional theatre productions such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*.

Before she appeared in *Sex Lies and Videotape*, Laura was just another struggling actress who took jobs waiting on tables to pay the rent on her New York apartment. But after the film came out, her life changed dramatically.

"It was like getting an 'A' in school," she chuckles. "But that doesn't really come close, does it? My friends say that I'm in a different league now. But I'm still me. My apartment in New York is still the same."

More movie offers quickly came her way. The first that appealed to her was a soapy hospital drama called *Vital Signs* (Fox Video) in which she played the working wife of a third-year medical student. It was fairly mediocre, but she got paid well when what was supposed to be just a few weeks work stretched on for months. This was followed by a high profile part as a waif-like, druggy prostitute in the monster hit, *Pretty Woman*.

"It was fun working with Julia Roberts" she says. "But I really didn't have that much to do. It was Julia's film from start to finish." She also accepts that *Quigley Down Under* is Tom Selleck's film. Well, that can be attested by the fact that he got a wage packet of \$4 million, while she pocketed a meagre \$300,000 - still not a bad take-home for a gal who was waiting tables a year or so earlier!

"Let's face it" says Laura, "*Quigley* is the kind of movie which really doesn't need any women in it at all. It's a big action adventure aimed at a predominantly male audience. But having said that, my character is tougher than a lot of the men in the cast. I get to punch and shoot people and generally behave in a very unladylike fashion. I really loved doing all that stuff."

After completing *Quigley* she came to England to make *Under Suspicion*, a rather good, old fashioned crime thriller set in Brighton in the 1950s. Her co-star is another tall guy, Irish actor Liam Neeson. He plays a down-at-heel private eye and she plays a smouldering femme fatale who may or may not have done in her husband and may or may not be trying to frame poor old Liam for the crime. She seems to have thoroughly enjoyed the experience of working in England. "People are so well-mannered here," she chuckles. "The weather was terrible, of course. I think we only had one sunny day in all the time we were shooting. I'd certainly like to come back here and do something else - preferably indoors...."

Next on her agenda is a Los

Angeles-based movie called *Once Around*, made by *My Life as a Dog* director Lasse Halstrom.

Laura's companion as she travels the world making movies is a postcard of Cannes - to remind her of how it all began. We'll leave her with her own summary of how things have gone so far. "I'm aware of how Hollywood must be seeing me now, and I think it's good that I'm going from hedonistic Cynthia to a down-to-earth waitress, to a druggy, crazed prostitute, and to Cora, who is also crazed in another sort of way. They're all very different and yet they have the same string that goes through them, and that's me."

Lying beneath those pixie lenses is a tough little lady.

COMPETITION

10 Copies of Warner's *Quigley Down Under* to be won

The mighty Australian outback plays host to this great action adventure which will really appeal to both Selleck and San Giacomo fans alike. With plenty of thrills and spills and a cracking pace, it would sit nicely in any film lovers collection. We have TEN copies to give away and you could stand a chance of winning one providing you tell us who starred as Laura's sister in *Sex, Lies and Videotape*. Answers to *Girls On Film Comp.*, Video World Magazine, The Northern and Shell Building, PO Box 381, Millharbour, London E14 9TW. The shutter closes on November 20th.

